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ABSTRACT

Presented is a paper, delivered at the 1975 Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, on planning and implementing an educational program audit for gifted students (K-12) of the Rowland Unified School District in California. Briefly explained in the introduction are the roles of the district evaluator and the county program auditor. A question and answer format is utilized in Section II to provide an overview of the audit process (including purpose and definition of the audit, professional role of the auditor, and stages such as developing performance objectives and designing an effective evaluation system). Sections III, IV, and V deal with steps in implementing one program audit plan; recommendations for improving future evaluation and program audit procedures (such as better coordination and timing of on-site visits); and program audit advantages (such as no-cost program evaluation by an external expert and identification of needed program improvements). Provided is a bibliography of approximately 40 references on educational program evaluation and audit. (LH)

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THE DESIGN, EVALUATION, AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AUDIT OF A DISTRICT-WIDE K-12 MENTALLY GIFTED MINOR PROGRAM

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This paper is the written portion of an oral and written presentation that was delivered at the 1975 Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children. It is a joint contribution of the Division of Program Evaluation, Research, and Pupil Services of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools and the Management and Staff team of the Advanced Learner Program for Mentally Gifted students of the Rowland Unified School District with the above two people acting as authors.

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

Found within most districts which have special programs of one kind or another is a person referred to as a director, specialist, consultant, or coordinator--in this case, resource teacher. This person, regardless of title, is responsible for the implementation and evaluation of the program in which he/she is involved. In the past, concerns have been expressed in regard to the appropriateness of the same individual being charged with the implementation of a program and also its evaluation. In many cases, this concern is probably justified; yet, school districts are reluctant to spend the thousands of dollars necessary to buy an outside evaluation or employ a permanent district evaluator. The answer to the dilemma is to go to the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Office and arrange for the services of one of their program auditors in the Division of Program Evaluation, Research, and Pupil Services to audit the program.

The actual procedures and steps to develop the audit plan and its implementation are outlined in Section III of this article. The important point to have in mind at this time is to understand who is actively involved in a program audit and what their roles are. In summary, the personnel involved are as follows:

District Employee: usually the coordinator, consultant, resource teacher, etc., responsible for implementing the program. This person acts as the evaluator.

County Office Consultant: the person designated as the program auditor. This person assesses and reports the degree of his agreement with the evaluation report regarding the level of attainment of pre-specified program objectives as measured by audit sample data analysis. This auditor prepares the interim and final audit reports which are considered confidential and go to the superintendent of the district requesting the program audit.

SECTION II

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AUDIT PROCESS

Over the last few years, that is during the pilot testing and full implementation of the audit services on a free to requesting district and community college basis, several questions have been routinely raised. This section will present an overview of the educational program audit process by way of the question and answer format, using questions most frequently asked.

WHAT IS AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AUDIT?

DEFINITION: An educational program audit is a performance control process based upon external reviews conducted by qualified outside consultants. It is designed to verify the results of the evaluation of an educational program and to assess the appropriateness of evaluation procedures used for determining the effectiveness of the operation and management of the program.

WHY HAVE AN AUDIT? WHAT MIGHT RESULT FROM IT?

There are many reasons why local educational agencies request program audits. Some of the results of past audits are:

1. The identification of clearer definitions of program personnel responsibilities.
2. The gathering of needed baseline data on the level of success of an educational program.
3. The determination of test scoring discrepancies.
4. The identification of model or "turnkey" programs which deserve to be developed and expanded.
5. The identification of areas for inservice training.
6. The enhancing of credibility for the program and for the local educational agency.

WHAT ARE THE PROFESSIONAL ROLES OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM AUDITOR?

The educational program auditor brings a relatively new professional role to education. He serves as a third party, free of local ties and interests, who verifies the results of the internal evaluation of an educational program.

THE AUDITOR IS:

1. Independent from the program to be audited.
2. A reviewer and not a decision-maker.
3. A reporter and an observer.
4. A professional who exercises care and integrity in performing the audit examination and in preparing audit reports.
5. Equipped to innovate within his own profession and to encourage reforms in the schools.

WHAT ARE THE STAGES IN THE AUDIT PROCESS?

STEP A: Optional Pre-Audit Assistance:
Educational Program Evaluation Assistance

Local educational agencies may elect to receive Educational Program Evaluation Assistance prior to having an audit of a program. Educational Program Evaluation Assistance is a service which is intended to strengthen the internal process of evaluation in a local educational agency. In collaboration with a county consultant, the local evaluator designs an effective evaluation system with appropriate statistical procedures which includes development of performance objectives, process objectives, evaluation specifications, the evaluation design, and related documents.

Step 1 - Orientation

Orientation sessions to the audit may be conducted for local educational agency personnel.

Step 2 - Review of the Total Program

The product and process objectives, the evaluation specifications, the design management plan, time frame, and related documentation are reviewed to ensure the auditability of the program.

Step 3 - Development of the Audit Plan

The audit plan is a planning and operational control document for the auditor and a quality and management control document for both the local program director and the local program evaluator. This plan indicates the techniques, schedules, processes, and procedures which the auditor will use in judging the adequacy of the evaluation process and in verifying the evaluation findings. One method of random sampling frequently used is matrix sampling.

Step 4 - The Audit Contract

The audit contract is a written agreement between the local education agency and the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Office. The purpose of the contract is to make explicit the conditions of the audit agreement. One section, for example, is the Assurance of Confidentiality section.

Step 5 - On-Site Visit(s)

Typically, the auditor makes one announced on-site visit and one unannounced on-site visit. During on-site visits, the auditor collects firsthand data as identified in the audit plan and for the purpose of ascertaining the degree of attainment of process objectives.

Step 6 - Interim and Final Audit Reports

Typically, the auditor presents an interim report following each on-site visit and a final audit report following the receipt of the final evaluation report. The final audit report is presented to the program evaluator, program director, and superintendent, usually within twenty working days of receipt of the final evaluation report. All of the reports are confidential and presented to only the program evaluator, program director, and superintendent.

Step 7 - Exit Interview and Local Educational Agency Evaluation of the Educational Program Audit Service they have Received

It is recognized that the audit process should itself be evaluated by those who receive the service.

CAN LOCAL EVALUATORS RECEIVE ASSISTANCE?

Yes. Should a local evaluator of a program which is being audited desire consultant assistance in the development of an evaluation management plan, statistical data analysis, data synthesis, evaluation report writing or interpretation, he should, as soon as possible, initiate a request for assistance by writing to Dr. Gordon Footman, Director, Division of Program Evaluation, Research, and Pupil Services, Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools Office, 9300 East Imperial Highway, Downey, California 90242.

CAN PROGRAM OBJECTIVES BE REVISED?

Yes, upon the agreement between the local program personnel and the auditor.

WHAT AUDIT TRAIL DOCUMENTS SHOULD PROGRAM PERSONNEL KEEP?

In order to do the job of verifying the evaluation of an educational program, the auditor must have direct access to firsthand evaluation data. The rule here is "Keep all evaluation trail documents. Keep whatever measure is used by the evaluator to determine whether or not each program objective is attained." Evaluation trail documents often used are test bookelts and answer sheets, pre- to post- tests, or post-tests only, summary sheets, levels mastered on criterion referenced tests, and attendance rosters for inservice staff meetings.

HOW DOES THE AUDIT RELATE TO THE STULL BILL?

Whereas the Stull Bill is concerned with evaluation of a single person, the audit is concerned with verifying the evaluation of an educational program. The local program evaluator will present a final evaluation report, and possibly interim reports as well, on the attainment or nonattainment of program objectives. As an outside, third party, the auditor samples evaluation data and verifies the results of the internally conducted program evaluation. The auditor's reports include audit findings relative to the attainment or nonattainment of program objectives. While the Stull Bill is concerned with a single person, the audit is concerned with a program. No person is mentioned by name in an audit report. If a program process objective were stated as "All instructors teaching a certain level will receive the math textbook, Mathematics Fundamentals, by the first day of class," and if during the on-site visit the auditor found that four instructors out of ten interviewed did not receive the books by the date indicated, the audit report would present just this information. The point of focus for the audit is the program.

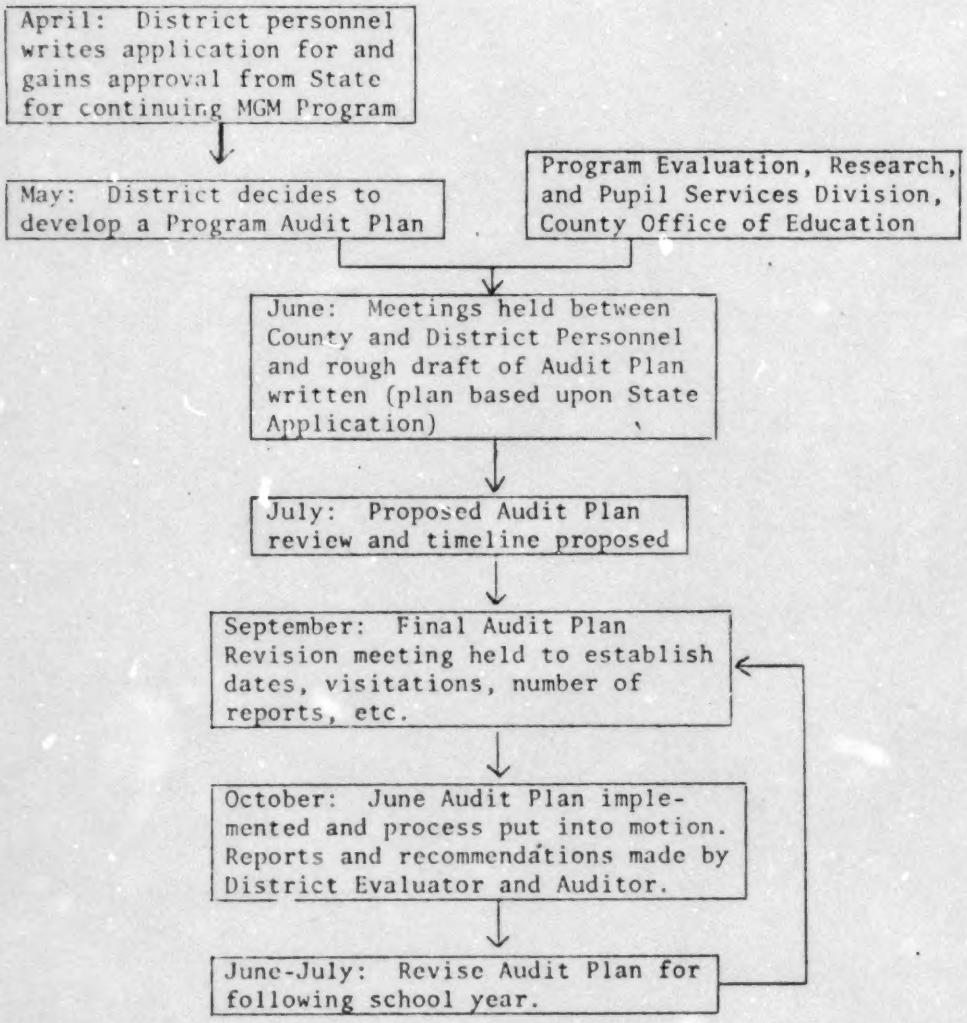
WHAT IF OTHER QUESTIONS COME UP?

Call your auditor of record to discuss the situation.

SECTION III

PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A PROGRAM AUDIT

The following diagram represents the steps followed by the Rowland Unified School District in developing a program audit plan for their mentally gifted minor program.


April: District personnel writes application for and gains approval from State for continuing MGM Program
May: District decides to develop a Program Audit Plan
Program Evaluation, Research, and Pupil Services Division, County Office of Education
June: Meetings held between County and District Personnel and rough draft of Audit Plan written (plan based upon State Application)
July: Proposed Audit Plan review and timeline proposed
September: Final Audit Plan Revision meeting held to establish dates, visitations, number of reports, etc.
October: June Audit Plan implemented and process put into motion. Reports and recommendations made by District Evaluator and Auditor.
June-July: Revise Audit Plan for following school year.

The foregoing procedures are not meant to be the rule of procedure but simply a planning guide. Each district varies and should establish its own organizational and procedural plan.

SECTION IV

SOME RESULTS OF AND LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE EVALUATION AND PROGRAM AUDIT OF THE ROWLAND UNIFIED MENTALLY GIFTED MINORS PROGRAM--1974-75

Part A: Timing of the on-site visits--the evaluator should do his on-site visits before the auditor begins his on-site visits

Audit and evaluation consultants from the Los Angeles County have recommended that an on-site visit and an evaluation report by the internal evaluator precede the on-site visit and audit report by the external program auditor. In this way, audit consultants have resisted "being the first one on the scene." However, the audit plan for the Rowland MGM Program called for an on-site visit by the auditor on November 18 and 19, with an audit report due in December. At the same time, it called for an evaluation report much later than the auditor's visit. This is now seen as an unfortunate error. The evaluator should have visited first; the evaluator's report should have been shared by program managers and teachers before the auditor appeared on-site.

The guideline that "the evaluator should be the first one on the scene" is reinforced in more concrete terms by an illustration of what happened relative to Objective 8.0 of the Rowland MGM Program Audit Plan. Objective 8.0 stated, "Each MGM student will create a student log no later than November 15, 1974." When the auditor arrived on November 18, the evaluator was only half through with his on-site visits to the schools. Since the evaluation report was not due until January 31, 1975, the evaluator seemed to have plenty of time to do his on-site visits.

Table I shows when the evaluator visited the twenty schools and what he found relative to Objective 8.0.

TABLE I

Column A - Date of Evaluator's visitation
Column B - X indicates logs had been made
Column C - X indicates logs had not been made
Column D - Date of Auditor's visitation
Column E - X indicates logs had been made
Column F - X indicates logs had not been made

School	A	B	C	D	E	F	Comments
Alvarado	11/18	X		11/18	X		Two visits made to cover all classrooms needing checking
Blandford	11/18	X		11/18	X		
Farjardo	11/20	X					
Giano	11/19	X		11/19	X		
Hollingworth	11/18	X		11/19	X		
Hurley	11/29	X					
Jellick	11/20	X		11/18	X		
Killian	11/19			11/17		X	Killian logs were checked twice and were made at time of second visit
	11/25	X					
La Seda	11/26	X					
Nogales High School	11/17	X					
Northam	11/26	X					
Rincon	11/25	X					
Rorimer	11/26		X				One teacher had logs ready - one teacher did not have logs ready
Rowland Elementary	11/19	X		11/18	X		
Rowland High School	11/19	X		11/17	X		
Shelyn	11/21	X					
Villacorta	11/28	X		11/19	X		
Ybarra	11/20	X		11/19	X		
Yorbita	11/27	X					
TOTALS	20	18	1	10	9	1	

As the first on-site visitor to some program schools out of the seven K-6, two 7-8, and one high school visited, the auditor (after talking with seventeen teachers and reviewing data on thirty-two MGM students) was forced to report that Objective 8.0 was not attained. That conclusion was reached since the auditor found one school out of the ten at which student logs had not yet been created. The logs were to have been created by November 15, as noted in the objective; but by November 18 and 19, one school out of ten had not seen the creation of the student logs. The auditor did report that student logs had been created at nine of the ten schools and that at seven of the schools MGM students had already logged such items as a field trip, a career to which they had been exposed, a speaker they had heard, or a creative product they themselves had created.

The auditor also made the following comments regarding possible revision of the evaluation plan:

> The auditor views the Evaluation Plan as satisfactory but possible to improve. Accordingly, the auditor recommends that the program evaluator make a series of on-site visits three to six weeks prior to the unannounced second on-site visit of the auditor (March 25, 1975). The auditor also recommends that the evaluator, after the evaluator's on-site visits, communicate in summary form the results of his internal evaluation to program personnel at each school site. While this activity was not included in the audit plan for the Rowland MGM program audit, the auditor believes that the implementation of this activity would provide the coordinator/evaluator with another "bench-mark" evaluation and an opportunity to make any necessary adjustments in program operation before the external auditor arrives (approximately March 25, 1975).

But, in a sense, it was already too late: the error had been made. An "outside person," the external auditor, had "come to our school first" and in checking on the status of the program had found that, at one school, student logs had not been created on time. Unfortunately, this is what happened. What should have happened was something like the following. First, all program participants, including MGM teachers, would have directly or indirectly helped develop the objectives, management plan and time frame included in the evaluation and audit plans. Therefore, all participants would be fully aware of the deadlines. Second, the first person to check on the attainment or nonattainment of program objectives should be the internal evaluator. Then when he writes, delivers, and discusses the evaluation report with program participants, he would also recommend increased effort to attain objectives that he found had not been attained. At that point, after an "internal and friendly" appraisal had been made and discussed, the program managers could invoke the fact that an "outside" auditor will be coming to schools in a few days or weeks to provide a second check as to the attainment or nonattainment of objectives.

This latter procedure is viewed to be the superior one since it provides not only for the opportunity for a maximum amount of internal monitoring, but also for team effort to occur prior to the on-site visits of the external auditor. In a sense, in the ideal situation, the internal evaluation can serve to motivate participants toward focused areas that need improvement--just in time for that other on-site visit--this time by the auditor.

Part B: Percentages--Look out for them

In one case we used a figure of 90% when only two people were involved in population to be checked.

Part C: Dates--Use a district master calendar to plan the auditor's visits

We scheduled the auditor's second visitation during the spring vacation.

State and district report dates vary and some flexibility for this should be built into the audit plan.

Part D: Class Records--Use a standardized or semi-standardized form

If the auditor is to check classroom records (in this case student logs) a standardized or semi-standardized form should be used to insure all information is recorded.

SECTION V

ADVANTAGES OF A PROGRAM AUDIT

The following are some advantages realized by the Rowland Unified School District in regard to the developing and implementing of a program audit plan.

1. Cost: For no cost, a district can obtain the services of an external program expert to validate the evaluation of a particular program.

2. Credibility: A program audit lends credibility to in-district evaluations of ongoing programs.

3. Influence: By informing "line" administrative personnel (principal) of a program audit, a staff person (coordinator) gains influence at building site level in terms of insuring that the program is going well.

4. Staff: Teachers involved in a program which is being audited tend to be more concerned with meeting objective deadlines.

5. Program Improvement: The use of an audit plan in the district enables district personnel to more readily identify areas of program needs and improvements. It should be kept in mind that program audits are audits of a program and not of personnel or funds.

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